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WANTED



ALIVE  
NOT  
DEAD!

# WANTED—ALIVE NOT DEAD!

## *A message to lobster fishermen*

by D. G. WILDER

The Canadian lobster catch averages about 45 million pounds a year worth nearly \$20 million to you. In many areas lobsters are your biggest cash crop. With proper management, good fishing should continue but we don't expect to see any very great increase. More people earning higher wages are, however, increasing the demand for lobsters. Improved methods of storing and shipping live lobsters have opened up new markets in the western United States, western Canada and in Europe (Figure 1). More of your catch is now marketed alive or as perishable, chilled meat rather than in sealed cans. If lobsters and lobster products are to reach distant markets in good condition they must be handled very carefully from the moment they are caught until they are marketed.

Probably about 3 million pounds of lobsters die each year during storage and shipment. Some deaths can't be avoided but most of them can because they are caused by careless or improper handling. In the long run losses to the buyers mean lower prices to you. For your own good you must see that lobsters are landed in the best possible condition. Lobsters that are injured during fishing operations will not live long even with the best of care. What can fishermen do to cut losses so everyone can share greater profits?

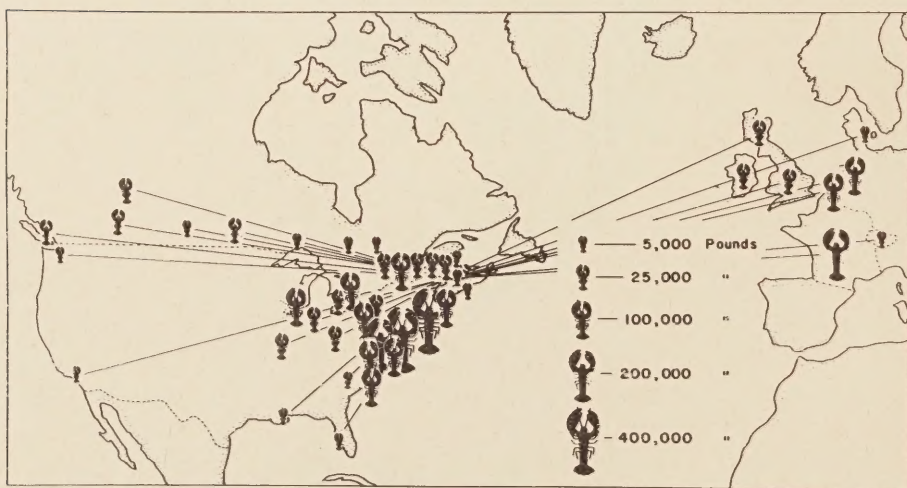
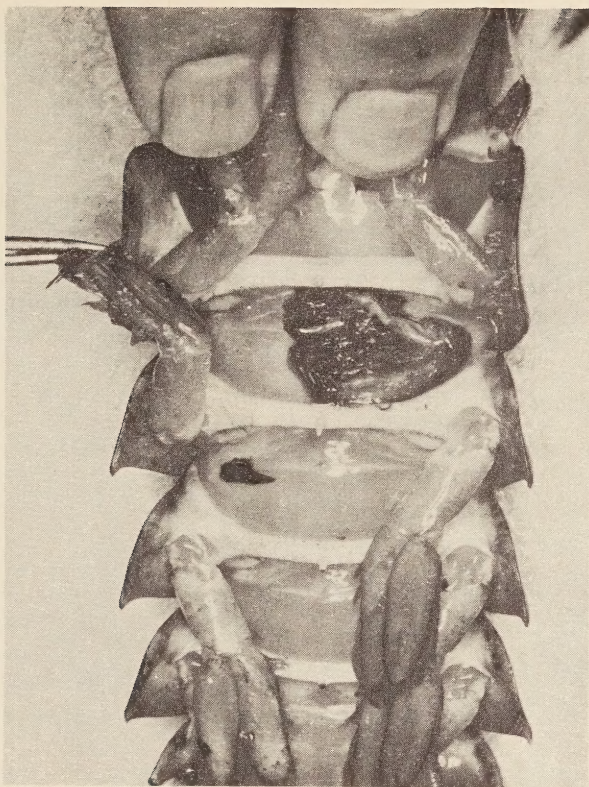


FIG. 1 Annual shipments of live lobsters to points in North America and Europe by one of Canada's largest distributors.





**FIG. 2** Brown areas that develop when delicate under surface of tail is punctured.

### **HANDLE LOBSTERS WITH CARE**

Hard-shelled lobsters may look rugged but they are more delicate than most people think. Remove them from the traps gently and be careful not to break off the claws. Lobsters with claws missing are marketed as lower priced culls. Separate claws spoil quickly and lower the quality of fresh, frozen or canned meat. You should, of course, handle shorts and berried lobsters carefully and promptly return them to the water. This gives you a better chance to catch them again as two-clawed, legal-sized lobsters no longer carrying eggs.

Lobsters dropped or thrown into a crate several feet away may not appear to be injured. However, the delicate under surface of their tails and other soft parts of their bodies are often punctured by the spines of other lobsters. The areas around such punctures soon darken as shown in Figure 2. The injured lobsters lose blood, become infected and often die.

### **BAND BOTH CLAWS QUICKLY**

To keep lobsters intended for the live market from injuring each other both claws must be fastened shut. This should be done promptly—if possible as soon as the lobsters are taken from the traps. The best way to do this is to put wide rubber bands around each claw. This can be done quickly and easily with a special banding tool such as is shown in Figure 3. The small cost of the bands





**FIG. 3 A quick, simple way to band lobster claws.**

and banding tool is soon repaid many times by the better survival of the lobsters. Some fishermen band only the crusher claw because they think the pincer claw does little damage. This is false economy. The sharp-pointed pincer claw often punctures delicate areas and the lobsters gradually weaken and die.

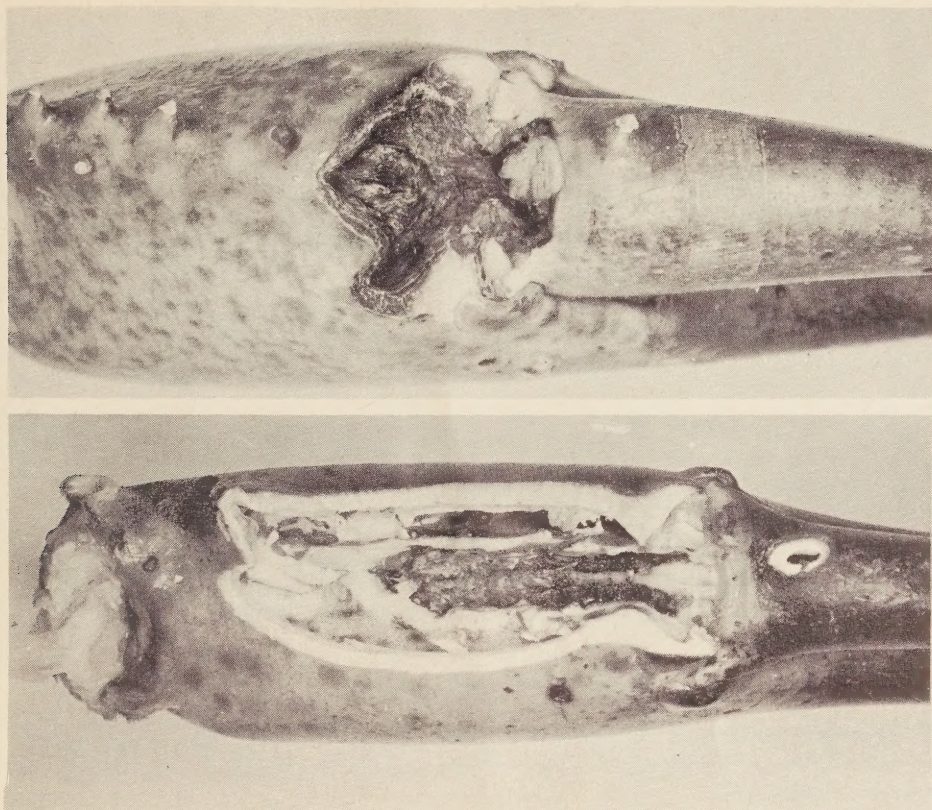
A less satisfactory method of fastening the claws is to insert a small wooden or plastic plug in the joint at the base of the thumb. Carefully plugged lobsters show no obvious ill effects for several days. Gradually, however, the wounds caused by the plugs become infected, the shell erodes, and the meat goes dark and off-flavour (Figure 4). Plugged lobsters are more likely to get infected with blood disease which sometimes causes heavy losses during storage. Several European countries do not allow their dealers to import plugged lobsters. For these reasons we strongly urge fishermen who still plug their lobsters to give banding a fair trial.

A few fishermen cut the tendons at the bases of the thumbs so the lobsters can't open their claws. Since this causes bleeding and higher storage losses it is not recommended.

### **KEEP LOBSTERS COOL AND MOIST**

Lobsters will live out of water for several days if you keep them cool and moist. They weaken and die quickly at temperatures above 60°F, particularly in a dry wind. When fishing, keep the crates closed as much as possible. On warm days it pays to cover full crates with a wet canvas to keep the lobsters cooler and out of the wind. Whenever you get a chance put full crates overboard—as often as possible for as long as possible. Some fishermen moor the first crates filled and pick them up later in the day. If you can't do this put the crates overboard if you stop for lunch. It will help if you pour pails of salt water over the lobsters every hour or so.





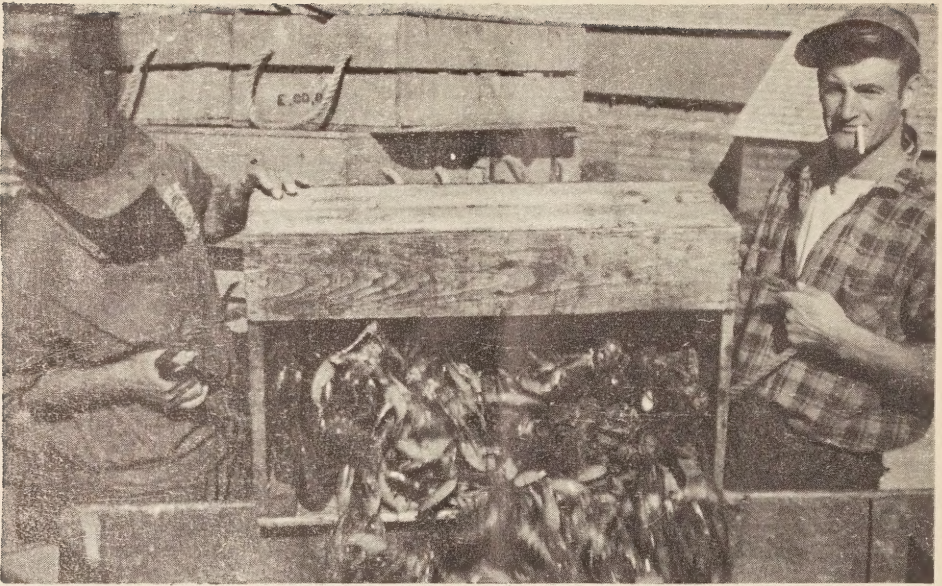
**FIG. 4 Erosion of the shell and darkening of the meat caused by plugs.**

The best way to keep lobsters cool and moist is to put them in a tank of running sea water. The watertight tank should be large enough to hold at least your market lobsters, especially those caught first. A small pump run off the main engine will circulate enough salt water to keep the lobsters in excellent condition. Lobsters that get such special care should be worth special prices! Saltwater tanks are used in lobster boats in the United States and in Europe, especially in warm weather.

### **DON'T CHILL OR FREEZE LOBSTERS**

Those of you who fish in the winter know the danger of chilling or freezing. No matter how carefully you handle chilled lobsters they are likely to drop their claws. Freezing will, of course, cause heavy losses. You can store small catches in your cabin but be careful not to overheat. Another method is to put the lobsters as you catch them in sea water in a half puncheon. Replace the water from time to time to make sure the lobsters don't die from lack of oxygen. In some cases it could pay to install a pump and circulate sea water through a storage tank.





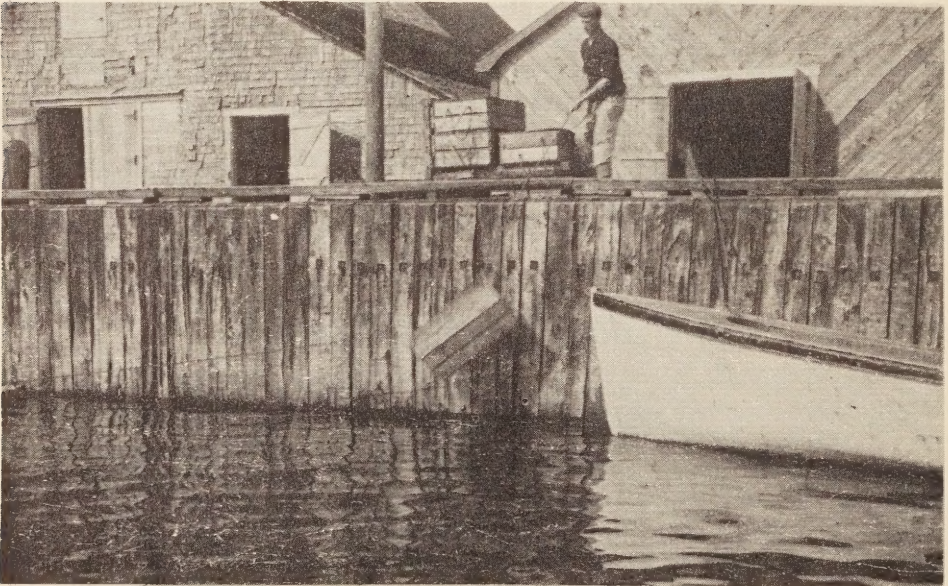
**FIG. 5 Rough handling causes unnecessary losses.**

### **PROTECT FROM RAIN**

Light rain falling on the backs of lobsters for short periods doesn't appear to harm them. You should not, however, take a chance on exposing your catch to continuous heavy rain.

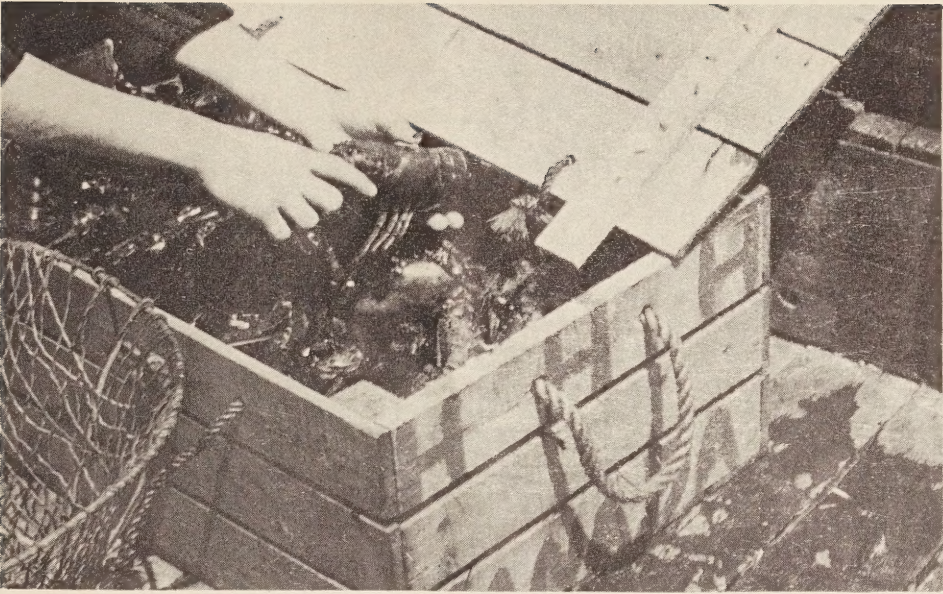
### **AVOID OIL, CREOSOTE, BILGE**

Live lobsters do not appear to be harmed by exposure to small amounts of kerosene, fuel oil or creosote but the meat gets an unpleasant oily taste. Larger amounts will, of course, gradually weaken and kill them. Bilge water is often



**FIG. 6 Dropping crates, even into water, can injure lobsters.**





**FIG. 7 Pack lobsters gently but firmly.**

heavily polluted and that from freighters may contain materials that are poisonous to lobsters. As much as possible keep your lobsters away from such dangers.

### **GIVE STORED LOBSTERS SPECIAL CARE**

When prices are rising it may pay you to store lobsters in crates or floating cars. Pick a spot protected from wave damage but where there is good circulation of unpolluted sea water. If possible, keep away from river mouths where there is a lot of fresh water. Since fresh water stays near the surface it can often be avoided by sinking the crates a few feet. Lobsters live for several months without food but if you feed them well there is less cannibalism. If, however, you overfeed there is danger of polluting the water with the unused food. Recently fed lobsters do not live well out of water so you should starve them for 3 days or more before shipping.

### **PACK PROPERLY**

Many fishermen accustomed to handling canner lobsters that were processed within a few hours have some bad habits. Methods you got by with a few years ago are no longer good enough for lobsters that must be shipped alive to distant markets or to plants where they are processed into chilled or frozen meat.

Don't shovel lobsters.

Don't dump them from one container to another (Figure 5).

Don't drop full crates—even into water (Figure 6).

Don't jam lobsters into crates with your feet.

Don't pound crates up and down to settle lobsters.

Don't force lids shut.

Don't overcrowd.

Pack your lobsters gently but firmly with their backs up and tails curled (Figure 7). If your lobsters have been stored, even for just a few days, you should cull them well before shipping. In the long run you have nothing to gain by shipping weak or dead lobsters. Many of the weaks die in shipment and those already dead may rot and kill others.

### **CO-OPERATE AND SHARE GREATER PROFITS**

To cut down the heavy losses that harm our valuable lobster industry, everyone — fishermen, buyers, plant workers, pound operators and shippers — must co-operate. To produce top quality lobster products and get our lobsters to market alive, you must first land them in excellent condition. Do your part in cutting down losses and earn a fair share of the greater profits.